Rice Exporters Facing discriminatory Tariff Barriers

*598. SHRI S. MADHAVAN: Will the Minister of COMMERCE be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that Indian rice exporters face discriminatory tariff barriers from European Countries; and

(b) if so, what are the steps taken to help Indian rice exporters?

THE MINISTER OF COMMERCE (SHRI PRANAB MUKHERJEE): (a) and (b) With a view to protecting the domestic rice-milling industry in some of their member-states, rice imports into the European Community (EC) are subject to variable levies which are meant to ensure that imports are not offered for sale within the European Community (EC) at prices lower than their internal prices for similar products. Rice imports from India, including Basmati rice, are subject to this levy. According to the latest Notification of the European Commission dated April 8, 1994, the variable levies on husked and milled Basmati and other long-grain rice varieties have been fixed at ECUs 350.07 and 603.66 per tonne respectively. These apply to imports of Basmati and long-grain varieties of rice from India, Pakistan, USA, Thailand, Uruguay, Vietnam and some others.

For Basmati rice imports, the Community provides, since December, 1986, a reduced levy of 25 per cent for imports of the first 10,000 tonnes of husked rice equivalent. The present arrangement is expected to continue until July 1996. Besides the levy concession on Basmati exports, Bangladesh as a rice-growing Least Developed Country (LDC) and the 69 African Carribean Pacific countries with whom EC has preferential trading arrangements, have a specially reduced levy for their rice exports to EC, which work out propotionately to just under half the normal levy rates. Besides, these countries, Egypt has also been granted 25 per cent levy concession on its rice exports to EC.

EC has not so far responded positively to Government's demarche on increasing the existing quantitative limit for the concessional levy for Basmati rice and to cover Basmati under its scheme of generalised preferences.

Steps taken to enhance the export competitiveness of Indian rice including (i) removal of inter-state restrictions on movement of rice and suspension of the levy on superfine non-basmati rice meant for export purposes by some State Governments, (ii) rationalisation of Minimum Export Prices, (iii) giving permission to exporters to import milling equipment at concessional duty under the Export Promoton Capital Goods Scheme, (iv) rice exporters are also eligible for the benefits of the 100 per cent Export Oriented Unit Scheme.

Indo-Czech economic cooperation

*599. SHRI SUSHILKUMAR SAMBHAJIRAO SHINDE:

SHRI RAJNI RANJAN SAHU:

Will the Minister of COMMERCE be pleased to state:

(a) whether any agreement for Indo-Czech economic cooperation was signed during the recent visit of a Czech delegation led by the President of Czech Republic; and

(b) if so, the details thereof, indicating the main areas of cooperation identified?

THE MINISTER OF COMMERCE (SHRI PRANAB MUKHERJEE): (a) No, Sir, no agreement for Indo-Czech economic cooperation was signed during the recent visit of a Czech delegation led by the President of Czecn Republic.

(b) The question does not arise.